

Mr. Ford's Page



UNEMPLOYMENT has two sides. The first and most urgent, of course, is the individual side. A man's job is the means by which he negotiates with the rest of the world for his support. His job is the certificate of his right to be a man among men, because he is doing a man's part. When anything occurs that separates the man from the job, or that renders the job temporarily unnecessary, there is a break in the alignment of individual affairs. When this happens on a large scale, when many jobs suddenly become unnecessary for any reason whatever, the dislocation is serious. It is felt everywhere, of course, but it is felt most keenly just at that point where individual need and supply, or family need and supply, meet.

The other side is society's side. Unemployment is a detriment to society at large. It is not to be estimated in money, for this is one of the numerous instances where the interjection of the dollar sign gives a wrong significance to the whole matter.

Now there are two statements which are true, namely: There is always something to be done, and, There is no one but ourselves to do it.

Even in the face of unemployment it is always true—There is always something to be done. Suppose we see large groups of idle men from the building trades. They are unemployed. For the time being they appear useless to themselves and to everyone else: at least, unemployment tends to make a normal man feel that way. So, there they are—a large, intelligent and useful group—idle. What is the cause? Isn't the world crying about a shortage of houses? Aren't there enough demands for homes to keep the building trades working at full time and overtime for years to come? "Yes," someone answers, "but, you see, there is a shortage of building materials. These men have nothing to do because they cannot get materials."

Oh! there is nothing to be done in the building trade, because there is something to be done in the building material trade, is that it? So much learned; then there really is something to be done. There is unemployment here because there ought to be more employment yonder.

Or take a large factory somewhere which has closed down. You ask the men why they are not at work. "Can't get any coal," they say. Why not? "Not producing it at the mines." Very well; here is unemployment at the factory because there is not sufficient employment at the mines.

You go to the mines and inquire what is the trouble. "Can't get any cars." Then you go to the railroads and inquire into their trouble. "Can't get cars made fast enough."

The result of the whole tour is a pretty clear idea that certain men are not able to work because there are not enough men working somewhere else. Either the producer of raw material is handicapped, or the transportation of the material is handicapped and the result of insufficient employment at one place is unemployment at another.

And yet, while men here are saying, "Nothing to do," conditions yonder are crying, "Much to be done." That is the point. There is always something to be done.

If men cannot work because the material cannot be shipped, then the "something to be done" is on the railroads. If men cannot work because coal is scarce, then the "something to be done" is at the mines. If the building trades are idle because there is a scarcity of lumber, then the "something to be done" is in the great labor forests. The world's job never plays out. There is always something to be done!

Now, the second truth comes in just here: there is no one but ourselves to do it. The conditions at mine, forest, railroad do not right themselves. If it were a shortage of hay, we should have to wait until the hay season rolled round: the condition would right

itself. But a shortage at mine, railroad or forest is not iron-bound by natural law, it is remediable by labor. Unemployment does not remedy anything. The very best it does is to wait for insufficient employment elsewhere to catch up. Sufficient or extra employment elsewhere will, naturally, make it catch up all the more speedily. If there were 20 men divided into four equal groups working on a job, and if one of the groups fell behind to such an extent that it held up the other three, what would be the logical thing to do? Have the three hindered groups turn in and help the group which had hindered them by falling behind, would it not?

Men do this on the farm, in the shop, in the store. When the stock clerk downstairs is slow in getting the stock up to the show-cases and counters, the merchant does not close his store until the stock clerk can get the stock upstairs. No, he sends help downstairs and gets the stock up as quickly as possible in order that trade may not be interrupted.

Why are we not as wise in the industrial field at large? Why cannot there be a systematic and wisely managed transfer of men in order to prevent the failure at one point tying up the work at another point? This transfer, of course, actually does occur after

a fashion. But it is a very haphazard fashion. We expect "labor conditions," or "economic conditions," or "business conditions" to right themselves by the accidental and undirected flow of the needed element toward the place where it is needed.

But men do not direct their own business that way. They do not say, "There is a shortage in the tool shop, but it will right itself; when the rumor gets around, men will begin to drift that way." No. They say, "Send 100 men to help them out in the tool shop."

In the great world of industry we largely trust to rumor to effect the change, and it is not effected very readily in these days. There have been numerous instances during the last two years when a mobile force of labor, available for three months here, or six months there, would have been sufficient to fill up all deficiencies and would have provided just that masterful reinforcement in the production or transportation of material that would have kept all business on an even keel.

There are always those who object to a suggestion like this on the ground that it smacks too much of officiousness on the part of employers. Shifting men from place to place, they say, is not agreeable. It savors, somehow, of indignity.

It need not be a matter for employers at all. Let it be entrusted to the government, or some co-operative department controlled by employers and employees for the purpose of maintaining an even balance between Agriculture and Mining, Transportation and Manufacture, and thus keep employment steady.

As to the shifting of men, there surely ought to be flying squadrons of young men who would be available for emergency conditions in harvest field, at mine, in shop, or on railroad. If there was danger of loss from fire, everybody would run to prevent it. If there is danger from loss by unemployment, people should be equally ready to run and prevent it. If the fires of a hundred industries threaten to go out for lack of coal, and 1,000,000 men are menaced by unemployment, it would seem both good business and good humanity for a sufficient number of men to volunteer for the mines and the railroads to prevent that occurrence.

There is always something to be done in this world, and there is only ourselves to do it. The whole world may be idle, and in the factory sense there may be "nothing to do." There may be nothing to do in this place or that, but there is always something to do. It is this fact which should urge us to such an organization of ourselves that this "something to be done" may get done, and unemployment reduced to a minimum.

THE world has never yet come to the point where there was nothing to be done. There is always something waiting to be done. In the most "idle" times, when shops are closed and men are out of work, there is always much that should be done. That is one of the mysteries of unemployment. With so many things waiting to be done, why should there be idle times? It seems to be a matter of distribution—like the question of food. If we could distribute labor, if we had mobile organizations of young men, who would serve as flying squadrons, going here for three months or there for six months as they might be needed to keep industry on an even keel and keep supply and transportation moving in order that every shop might be kept busy, it would help out one side of the problem.